

# AF Chief Cites Figures to Show Cut in Bombing

By Michael Getler 12/17/71  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Air Force Secretary, Robert C. Seamans yesterday contradicted critics who claim that the Pentagon is stepping up the bombing in Southeast Asia to cover the U.S. withdrawal on the ground.

The air war is declining "any way you slice it or look at it," Seamans said.

Armed with a half-dozen charts, Seamans said that the level of bombing had declined by more than 50 per cent since the height of the air war in 1968 and was continuing to drop.

Seamans, who returned last week from a 12-day visit to Southeast Asia, made these points:

- The number of attack sorties flown by all U.S. planes, including B-52 bombers, in all of Southeast Asia will have dropped to about 40 per cent of the 1968 peak year by the end of 1971. A sortie is one flight by a single plane.

- The total of all bombs dropped by both the U.S. and South Vietnamese air forces throughout Southeast Asia had dropped from a peak of 1,437,000 tons in 1968, to 651,000 tons for the first ten months of this year. Seamans estimated that the total for this year would still be below the 1970 total of 977,000 tons.

- Answering critics who point out that the U.S. was heavily bombing North Vietnam in 1968, and that new statistics could mask an increase in the level of bombing of South Vietnam since then, Seamans displayed a chart showing the U.S. attack sorties—not including helicopter

smaller and older, and can do far less damage than the planes in the U.S. arsenal.

## Prompted by Study

Seamans' appearance before newsmen yesterday was no doubt prompted by the release last month of a study by Cornell University's Center for International Studies which decried the heavy emphasis the United States has placed on bombing and suggested that such a policy was a failure.

That report also led off with an assertion that more bombs were dropped during the first three years of the Nixon administration, even though North Vietnam was off limits, than the last three of the Johnson administration. This fed criticism that Mr. Nixon had indeed stepped up the bombing elsewhere.

A lesser-noted portion of the report pointed out, however, that the air war—measured either by sortie rates or bomb tonnages—had in fact "declined substantially" from the 1968 peak.

## Defends Effectiveness

Seamans also sought to rebut criticism that the air war had not been effective.

He said that even with fewer planes and raids, U. S. air power, with the help of electronic spotting devices on the ground and new so-called "smart bombs," had managed to cut the amount of supplies actually reaching South Vietnam and Cambodia through the Ho Chi Minh trail to the lowest point in four years.

Seamans said that whereas

gunships—inside South Vietnam had fallen off from about 200,000 in 1968, to fewer than 15,000 thus far this year.

#### Stepup by Saigon

He pointed out, however, that the South Vietnamese Air Force — rapidly being expanded by U.S. aid—is now flying two or three times as many raids in their own country as are U.S. pilots.

Seamans did not provide specific figures on the bombing in Laos and Cambodia, but Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said later that both the total number of attack sorties and the tonnage dropped in both these countries would be less this year than in 1970.

Friedheim said the reduction would be smaller in Laos, where the United States continues a heavy pounding of the Ho Chi Minh supply trails.

The United States, according to Seamans, has also reduced the level of its own attack planes of all types based in Southeast Asia from a high of 1,200 in 1968 to about 350 now.

The South Vietnamese Air Force has already been built up to a strength of 41 to 42 squadrons and will grow to 51 by mid-1973, Seamans said. The attack planes and gunships being given the South Vietnamese, however, are these."

the Communists got an estimated 21,000 tons of supplies through the trail in the 1969-1970 dry season, the 1970-1971 total would only amount to about 9,500 tons. In both years, he suggested, the enemy actually tried to get through roughly 68,000 tons.

Seamans estimated this year's figure is only about half what the Communists need to fight effectively.

#### Heavy Toll of Trucks

Most of the enemy supplies come down the Ho Chi Minh trail in trucks, and Seamans claimed that the Air Force and Navy hit 23,000 to 25,000 trucks last year and probably destroyed half of those hit.

But the North Vietnamese apparently never run out of trucks. While the big truck depots around Hanoi and Haiphong were empty just six months ago, according to Seamans, U. S. reconnaissance photos now show "7,000 to 8,000" more in those areas.

Seamans said the trucks come from Russia and China. Asked if this didn't seem unusual since the Russians apparently have trouble building enough trucks for themselves and are seeking U. S. help in building them, Seamans said all he knew was that U. S. reconnaissance "had spotted

